

# ALL ABOARD ST. MARYS



LEADING THE FIGHT FOR BETTER CANADIAN RAIL PASSENGER SERVICE – NOW!

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## **Ontario's high-speed rail study: A two-year waste of time and money**

ST. MARYS, ON – As the All Aboard St. Marys citizens' committee suspected from the start, the Government of Ontario has now admitted it never intended to launch high-speed rail passenger service from Toronto to London – only study it.

“When Deputy Premier Deb Matthews told a London audience on April 19 that the government never specifically said it would deliver high-speed rail, we not only weren't surprised, we were pleased,” says Chris West of All Aboard St. Marys. “With this politically-driven fiction off the table, Ontario – in partnership with Ottawa – needs to get on with a plan to deliver a practical and doable rail solution to the very real mobility problems of our region.”

Former Minister of Transportation Glen Murray started beating the high-speed rail drum in 2014 on the basis of a skimpy pre-feasibility report that promised a bullet train connecting Toronto and London by way of Kitchener, but bypassing downtown Guelph and excluding Stratford and St. Marys completely. It would have cost billions, taken a decade to build and required an all-new line cutting across irreplaceable farmland between Kitchener and London.

The government promoted this under-researched scheme before the election, extending it to include Windsor afterward. That led to the appointment of former federal Transport Minister David Collenette to oversee a deeper study, which included the hiring of new civil servants and the awarding of consulting contracts, all at a cost that hasn't been revealed. The Collenette report was supposed to be released last October, but it still hasn't been made public.

Says West, “Numerous prior studies found high-speed rail to be too expensive and ill-suited to meeting the real needs of our region. VIA Rail Canada determined in 1989 that the solution was major upgrading of the existing line through Stratford and St. Marys, along with new locomotives and rolling stock, to provide faster, more frequent and more affordable service. Instead, the Mulroney government nixed the VIA plan and cut the service in 1990, which was followed by another cut by the Harper government in 2012.”

The 1989 VIA study pegged the cost of this upgrading of the existing Toronto-Kitchener-London service – and all the other VIA routes in Southwestern Ontario – at \$375 million, which would have bought a new fleet of modern trains and dramatically improved the infrastructure. This higher-speed, high-performance rail plan would have boosted the service through St. Marys and Stratford to six roundtrips daily and cut the Toronto-London running time to two hours and 10 minutes. Some of the infrastructure work in that plan has now been undertaken east of Georgetown as part of GO Transit’s Kitchener Line expansion project.

High-performance rail service such as that proposed by VIA in 1989 is now in place on several corridors in the U.S. Its benefits and the means of implementing it are described in the All Aboard St. Marys brochure, *This is High-Performance Rail*, available on the group’s website at <http://allboardstmarys.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/HPR-Brochure-Revised-170412.pdf>

“The federal government is providing \$752 million to assist Ontario in converting the eastern half of the Toronto-London line into a high-frequency GO rail service,” says West. “With the demise of the high-speed dream scheme, it’s time for both governments to work together to build on that public investment and bring the benefits of modern rail service all the way west to London.”

All Aboard St. Marys will be advancing the case for high-performance rail service in the weeks ahead by meeting with politicians and community leaders all along the Toronto-Kitchener-London line. The need for such a service is urgent and the time for action is now, especially in the wake of the province’s failed and flawed high-speed rail promise.

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